A Speculation in a Contingent Inheritance

A GUARDIAN ANGEL

Cronkite Finds the Weak Point of the Shady Broker

I.

When Mary Lucas made her will she had no thought that evil complications might ensue. She left her large estate to her daughter Kate, who was to receive it on marrying or reaching the age of 21 years; but in the event of the girl's dying an unmarried minor, then the property vested absolutely in her husband Ralph Lucas.

Such a disposition had seemed advisable to the family lawyer, Judge Josiah Marcellus, and Mrs. Lucas had followed his suggestions in the main, only adding certain restrictions to safeguard the property should Kate marry unworthily.

But testamentary wills are often perverse. They fulfil the letter but not the spirit of the testator's intentions almost malignantly. They serve to illustrate the vanity of human wishes in contrast with that strength of circumstance which men call destiny.

Mrs. Lucas died, then, well content at having provided for her daughter's future, and firm in the belief that her husband's own fortune would more than suffice for his needs. She had not, however, reckoned on the inability of one both idle and foolish to let well enough alone.

For very lack of something to do and of knowing how to do it, Lucas indulged in speculation so thoroughly that when bankruptcy proceedings were instituted against him his creditors found little to reward them for their pains. But in the hunt for something available one sharp cross-examiner brought to light Lucas's contingent interest in his wife's estate.

This interest was sold at public auction, and bought for a moderate sum by Enoch Coyne, a broker in a small way, whose taciturn loyalty was his chief asset in business. Thus it came about that through Mary Lucas's anxious thought for her daughter's welfare an unknown stranger would benefit largely by preventing the girl's marriage and encompassing her death. How veritable, then, the old adage, "Where there's a will, there's a way"—a way, of course, through which a will can be set at naught.

Kate was just 20; so she must live for a year, if unmarried, before the property would be hers. But Kate was blissfully engaged to her ideal, Lionel Townsend, tall, dark, handsome—as romantic in appearance and bearing as were the circumstances under which he had come, seen and conquered.

"If this young man is as unexceptionable as you say," said Judge Marcellus, "why not marry them off at once, out of hand, and thus make your contingent rights absolutely harmless because absolutely worthless? That is the quickest way of settling your worry, Lucas."

Ralph Lucas looked up with that air of wretched perplexity which becomes more and more the symbol of a man of good intentions but feeble deeds the older he grows. He was honestly troubled over the situation, attributing it to his own lack of business judgment; but yet, he didn't know, this remedy might be worse than the disease.

"I can't say anything against Townsend," he replied with a helpless smile, "but I have a feeling, don't you know? Perhaps it is because I have always been so fond of George Darrell, so confident that he and Kate would make a match——"

"If you can't say anything," retorted the Judge testily, "then there's nothing to be said. Kate knows her own mind; since there are no objections to her choice, it must control. Your neighbor, young Darrell no doubt is a nice little fellow; but he has had his chance, the chance of a lifetime, I might say, for Kate and he were children together. It is his own fault if he failed to improve it. The speediest way to cure an evil is to use the means already at hand. Therefore, I repeat, marry Kate off to Townsend."

After Lucas had left, determined to adopt this advice, the Judge turned resolutely to his interrupted brief. But in vain. The sweet face of Mary Lucas, as a girl, a bride, a young mother, kept rising reproachfully before him.

Granted that he had reason to be piqued because Ralph had suffered the bankruptcy proceedings to be taken, the sale of his reversionary interest to be made, without notifying him; still, he himself had drawn the will, and must be partly responsible for any evil growing out of its provisions.

Having mentally assured himself that it wasn't any of his business any way, the Judge summoned Abe Cronkite from the outer office and explained the situation to him.

"What I want you to do, Abe," he concluded, "is to act the part of guardian angel for this girl. Invisible, silent, unknown, you must protect her from all possible danger until she is safely married."

"It will be a case of handsome is what handsome does, sir," replied the detective with a grim smile, as he set forth on his mission.

II.

Enoch Coyne's office was popularly supposed to be in his hat; but, for all that, the old broker had a local habitation, far over on the East Side, where he cooked his own food, made his own bed and thought out his own schemes—all alike mean and dirty. A solitary man, he had acquired through long habit those neutral hues of manner, dress and speech whereby creatures of the shade avoid observation.

Thus it came about that Broker Coyne was known only through his deeds, but when year after year his name was dug out from the muck covering some discreditable transaction, these deeds gradually exemplified the man, causing him to be feared, and justifying the Judge's precautions on learning of his purchase of Ralph Lucas's contingent interest.

Such a man as Coyne, so furtive, silent and cautious, is like a machine, set in a secure and isolated place, and certain to do its work, unless it breaks down through some inherent weakness. What then was the weak spot through which the broker might be induced to betray himself?

A negative problem this would have seemed to an investigator less patient than Abe Cronkite. A week's minute scrutiny showed that Coyne was not accessible through ordinary temptations.

He neither drank nor gamed; he was as remote from women as a monk. At just such an hour he started to his daily vocations; at just such an hour he returned to his lonely room. What hope of indiscretion could there be from an absorbed and passionless automaton?

But Cronkite despised not the day of little things, realizing that the most trifling of them were facts, and that from facts, whether great or small, must be deduced a practicable theory. At one time he saw Coyne, as was natural, refuse alms to a street beggar; but when the man cursed him roundly he turned and gave him a piece of money. He noted, too, that the broker, as might be expected, burned one sparse lamp in his room; but he kept it burning until the morning light.

Though ordinarily sparing of steps, Coyne crossed the street, one hot day, to avoid passing under a ladder. Again, he lingered long on the porch, craning his neck in awkward fashion, in order to see the moon over his right shoulder.

During a severe thunderstorm it was evident from the shadow on the curtain that he was pacing his room agitatedly and this same unease displayed itself when a dog howled dismally under the window.

Little things these, and others like them; but what did they denote? Why, that Enoch Coyne was superstitious—subject to all the cowardly fears that beset a believer in omens.

One evening the old man slunk out from his lodgings and threaded his way through the gloomy streets to a more gloomy house. Presently he came out and threaded his way back again, passing with a disappointed air the detective who had kept him in sight.

"She has been pinched," volunteered a gamin, indicating the house with his thumb.

"Who has?" asked Cronkite.

"The medjum who uster fake there."

The very next evening Enoch Coyne, on returning from business, read with much concern an announcement on a small tin sign in the entry. Two hours later he crept stealthily up the stairs and rapped on a door, showing the same mystic address, "Fligo, Astrologer."

A ruddy light illumined the room, which was filled with such cheap appurtenances of the craft as a sidereal globe, a mortar and pestle, a stuffed owl, a skull with the crossbones, a crystal filled with sparkling liquid. Amid the pillows of a divan a patriarchal seer was engrossed over a parchment covered with cabalistic symbols. Without raising his eyes he demanded the old broker's business.

"I would know the future," Enoch Coyne faltered, "not generally—I can take care of myself—but regarding length of life. I want to live; I am afraid to die."

The astrologer asked briefly the important dates of Coyne's vital record. He made certain abstruse calculations.

"Why," he exclaimed surprisedly, "you ought to live for many years yet—a full score, at least, if you haven't turned events from their natural course through your own evil act. To be more definite, did you on the 14th day of last month, at 12 o'clock noon, do something to imperil the life of an innocent young girl——"

"The 14th day of last month, at 12 o'clock noon!" gasped poor Coyne, as well he might, since then it was that the Lucas sale had taken place. "I don't know—suppose I did——"

"Then the very moment that young girl dies, you die also, unless——"

"Unless?" cried the frightened man, "you said unless?"

"If a principal is punished, the agent escapes. Of course, if I knew who had instigated you, I might be able to exert such celestial influences——"

"Then if I tell you this person's name——"

"Person?" thundered the seer, with that intuition with which Cronkite so often reenforced his observation and logic; "tell me the name of the woman for whom you acted, and I will do the rest."

III.

Lionel Townsend called on Mrs. Mayence at the exclusive uptown hotel where she was staying. He had not seen her for years, and he would not be seeing her now, had there not been a tone to her note, too indefinite to be pointed out in word or phrase, that had sounded a threat. And so, being a prudent man, he called, counting upon the charm of personal presence to obliterate the rancor of memory.

The liveried servant who showed Townsend to the lady's apartments was an elderly, stolid looking man, who had the faculty of doing the right thing at the right time in so unobtrusive a way as to avert attention from himself. Thus, after he had announced the visitor, he was enabled, through sedulously gathering up some odds and ends lying about the room, to slip unnoticed, by way of the private hall, into a large closet with convenient cracks in its partitions for an acute ear.

Mrs. Mayence, without rising, waved Townsend to a seat by her side. For a moment she studied him through the dull, dead eyes that alone made her bloom suspicious. Then she said pityingly,

"And so you are going to marry at last, my poor Lionel?"

"Yes, I am," replied the man doggedly.

"And without a thought of your vows, your pledges to me? Oh, fie, sir."

"We need not go into that, Genevieve; there was fault on both sides."

"How magnanimous; you quite put old Father Adam to shame. But now tell me all about the one blessed above all women. Where you met; how you met; and all the pretty, precious details of love's young dream."

There must have been the restraint of intimate association upon him, or otherwise Townsend, goaded by such mockery, would have stamped out of the room. As it was, after an impatient tug at his mustache, he complied, his expression and tone actually growing tender as he proceeded.

"Kate is a most lovely girl," he said, "for all your sneers, and the manner of our meeting did make a charming little romance. It was last summer, down at the shore.

"I sat at ease in my room, late one night, smoking in the dark, as I gazed at the shadowy vessels gliding by. Then, along the roof of the veranda, just outside of my window, there came the patter of the little feet.

"A white figure tripped by, as swiftly, as noiselessly as a ghost, making all unheeding for the railless edge. Well, Genevieve, I did some hustling for a moment. It was thought that I was both self-possessed and plucky, and above all gentle in the way I caught and bore into safety the unconscious girl——"

"A sleepwalker; what a suggestion!" cried Mrs. Mayence, as if awed by a flash illumining the future.

"Yes; she had been ill with a fever; it was said it had never happened before. Well, of course, there was a kindly feeling, which deepened and ripened under a little posing, some trifling attentions—you know it all better than I can tell. And that is all, except that she has a tidy fortune from her deceased mother, which, of course, I will have also, to speak generously——"

"Which you won't have," interrupted Mrs. Mayence, leaning forward for the first. "Haven't you had the common sense to examine the records and thus learn that this fortune, if the girl ever gets it, is so bound around with restrictions for the benefit of herself and her brats that it would be far more of a curse than a comfort to that superfluous tag, her husband——"

"How do you know?" snarled Townsend. "What interest have you——"

"What interest?" Mrs. Mayence repeated gaily; "a contingent intetest, which may become a vested interest. I have been putting my eggs in one basket, Lionel; I have been submitting my little all to the issues of life and death——"

"You don't mean that you are the mysterious purchaser at the bankruptcy sale, whose identity and purpose have been scaring old Lucas out of his few wits——"

"The trusty Coyne acted for me. I have his written assignment——"

"But why? My God! why?"

"Because, dearie, I still have a fondness for your ungrateful self; because I know the right wife for you, who would bring you this fortune without any degrading restrictions; whom you once loved; whom you love now, you know you do——"

Townsend walked disorderedly across the room and back.

"But how?" he faltered.

"You don't see how, stupid?"

And then there were whispers, becoming softer as heads drew nearer, whispers too faint to be distinguishable through the cracks and crevices of a closet, yet whose meaning had already been interpreted by the aid of that close scrutiny of the connection of ideas whereby the truth was so often revealed to Abe Cronkite.

IV.

As the Judge had said, George Darrell was a nice little fellow; but the praise of the first adjective failed to compensate its unfortunate subject for the disadvantages and mortifications of the second. Diminutive George surely was; a whole inch shorter actually than Kate; a full foot shorter apparently, when they walked together as the girl had often reproachfully told him.

Indeed, it was to this lack of stature that the young man attributed the failure of his wooing; and oh, it was hard when his heart was so stout, his spirit so strong, to do and to die if need be for his lady love. If he only had the chance to prove himself a man for a' that—even as George ceased from his sighing out of utter despair the chance came.

It was Townsend who made the suggestion, and the reasons he pleaded were so delightfully romantic that, abandoning the wedding preparations for a few days, Kate journeyed with the submissive Ralph Lucas to that hotel by the sea where she had first met her lover and where he was now awaiting her. Yes, it was truly a lovely thought that they should conclude their courtship by revisiting the scenes and living again the events amid which it had its blissful beginnings.

The old fashioned house was not at all crowded, and the party had no difficulty in securing their former rooms—Lucas and his daughter in the suite at the northern end of the second story front, and Townsend far down the corridor, near its southern end. Even the moon was shining in the same phase as it had the summer before, and, as then, the shadowy vessels still glided by.

One night Townsend sat at ease in his room, smoking in the dark by the window. He was waiting patiently, exultantly waiting, for 12 o'clock to strike, for then Kate had agreed to meet him in the balcony at the southern end of the corridor.

The hapless Lucas all unconsciously had had much to do with the girl's rash assent. He had been so fussily solicitous of her safety, so manifestly apprehensive lest the sleepwalking might recur, that she and her Lionel had really had no opportunity to look out together and yet alone upon the spot where they had met and found each other under such dear yet terrifying circumstances.

The house was dark and still, for its guests were of the comfortable sort who retire early and rise late. They were asleep, so Townsend reassured himself—especially that gouty, rather stolid looking invalid, whose unexpected occupancy of the inner room at the southern end of the corridor he had for the moment feared might disconcert his plans.

They were all asleep except the guest in the outer room opposite; for there Genevieve Mayence, having registered under an assumed name, was waiting, ready to lend her arms and wits to the success of his enterprise.

It would not be necessary, Townsend argued, though the evil spirit that now wholly possessed him thrilled responsively as he recognized how nervously powerful, how alert and sufficient, how pitiless such aid would be. Kate was so simple, so affectionate, so unsuspecting.

He could draw her out on the roof at the southern end, to its very verge, to show her how she had poised in her sleep—a sudden push, and down she would fall to the cruel pavement thirty feet below, to lie there dead, the self-evident victim of somnambulism, while he slipped back unobserved to his room.

A slight sound roused Townsend from reflection; it sent him springing to the sill with every nerve and muscle tense. Yes, there could be do doubt—along the veranda roof the patter of little feet was approaching.

Had that actual sleepwalking for which he had secretly hoped, on which he had not dared depend, recurred through the mystic influence of association? He looked out—a feminine figure in white tripped by. He leaped out, following noiselessly until near to the southern verge, and then grappling with it ferociously.

To Townsend's amazement, muscles of steel resisted him, they forced him back and down, choking off his cry of "Genevieve!" But that half cry was sufficient.

Mrs. Mayence sprang from her window to her lover's aid. Between them they might have overmastered the feminine figure in white, so strangely, strongly masculine, had not the invalid from the inner room, as stolid looking as ever, but in no degree gouty, come hurrying around to the corner, a revolver in each hand.

"My fearless ally, Mr. George Darrell, may be little," said Abe Cronkite, the next day, when the excitement had dwindled with the removal of the prisoners, "but, oh, my!"

"Kate must reward his daring and devoted impersonation of her," Ralph Lucas asserted. "I shall insist——"

"You needn't insist, papa," interrupted Kate, as she entered on Darrell's arm. "George and I have just followed our guardian angel's advice——"

"Bless you, my children," murmured Abe Cronkite.

As to Wearing Sealskins in Summer; Remarks by One of Fashion's Victims in a Park Tank

The barking of the Zalophi Alaskanii could be heard as far as the big gate and further. They always bark, but that day they barked more than usual. It was one hundred and something in the shade.

The woman hurried over the hill to the pond occupied by the Zalophi Alaskanii. There several thousand dollars' worth of sealskins flopped excitedly about in the pond or threw themselves on the rocks, lay there panting awhile, then fell off into the water.

The fringe of people hanging on the spikes of the fence exhibited no surprise. It was a very hot day for sealskins.

In spots in the water heads revealed themselves. They were thrown back in the attitude of sleep. Now and again a mouth would fly open. It was from these mouths that the barks had issued—were still issuing, in fact. But were they barks or snorts or sneezes?

High on the big, gray boulder a little sea lion had thrown himself with reckless abandon. The sun had turned him to a reddish brown. Once in awhile he flapped a weary flipper or, rather, wing, fanning himself, but not often. When the wing failed to fan he appeared to be dead.

Really, it was a terrible day for sealskins.

The big, brown, sea lion, the king of the sea lions, in fact, flopped heavily out of the water, fell on the rock and lay there as helpless as the small sea lion from the heat. It was hardly three minutes before he was sound asleep. That, too, in spite of the barking going on around him.

The woman coughed twice so as not to waken him too suddenly.

"I should like a few words with you, if you please," she smiled, as he turned his head and took a sealionish look at her out of his little eyes.

He raised his right wing and fanned himself. Then:

"If you had on a five hundred dollar sealskin thi4 weather," he sighed, "you wouldn't feel much like talking. I can tell you that."

He coughed, sneezed and continued querulously:

"Where is the ice man? Why doesn't he put a lump of ice in the pond or turn on an electric fan or something? What's the keeper about that that he doesn t cool us off a little. I'd like to know?"

A girl in a bright pink dress hung herself to the fence.

"What are they?" she asked. "Whales!"

At that the big brown sea lion became wide awake. Not only was he awakened but, turning suddenly—that is, as suddenly as his heavy sealskin would permit—he plunged headlong into the water.

The woman thought he had drowned himself, but he hadn't. As she stood gazing at the place in the water where she thought he ought to be, he appeared on the other side. He wabbled up the rock, threw himself upon it and lay there motionless, his wings outspread, his tail flat and desolate.

By and by he lifted up his head, raised a feeble wing and beckoned to her with it. Unable to swim across on account of the fence, she hurried around.

"Well?" she said, for the big sea lion seemed to have forgotten that he had beckoned to her.

He had gone fast asleep again.

He opened the eye nearest to her and focused her with it.

"Oh, it's you again, is it?" he asked in a surprised way which rather hurt her feelings, seeing he had been the cause of her hurrying around.

"What did you think of that?" he asked presently. "Whales!"

Before the woman could tell him what she though of it a shop girl came up and stood at the fence with her best beau.

"We've got a lot of sealskins better than any of those," she remarked complacently, with a comprehensive wave of her hand over pond and rock, "but we keep them in camphor in the summer time. What little ears they've got! My goodness!"

The big sea lion wriggled to the water's edge.

"Here!" called the woman softly. "I wouldn't take it so hard if I were you. They are going now."

He wriggled back accommodatingly.

"That's just it," he complained. "If you could only take off our sealskins this weather and put them in camphor it would be much more comfortable. Then put them back on when we need them. But we can't. They are fastened to us."

"I'd be glad they were, if I were you," suggested the woman, "because——"

"Yes, I know," nodded the big sea lion. "We'd die if we were rid of them. Well," resignedly, "I'd just about as lief die as wear them in July and August. Sometimes I think I'd rather be dead than have to lie here sweltering and listen to what these people have got to say about us, anyway. Do you wonder that we spit at them? Little ears! I wonder if they think our ears are too little to hear out of."

Two stood by the fence, a man and a woman.

"What idiotic looking things they are," the woman began, "but they can be taught. I saw a performing sea lion in Canada. They had taught her to do a lot of things. She played the banjo. They called her Performing Minnie."

As they disappeared the big sea lion raised a fatigued wing and fanned himself a time or two.

"If I've heard about that performing Minnie once," he lamented, "I've heard about her a thousand times. She must be a remarkable seal. I suppose," a trifle sarcastically, "that when she dies and turns to a sealskin they'll be coming and telling us she is still thrumming away at that everlasting banjo of hers."

His remarks were interrupted by the shrieks of two sea lions who were engaged in what appeared to be a mortal combat on the summit of a rock. They fell into the water, still biting at each other's ears, and the barking was taken up by all the other sea lions.

They quieted down in the course of time and the wet heads in the water and out fell back in the favorite attitude of sleep.

"I suppose," recommenced the woman politely, "that you long for your native home, Alaska, now and then. Don't you?"

The big sea lion came quickly out of his doze.

"Alaska!" he exclaimed. "Alaska! Great rocks going down to a real sea without a fence around it! A sea that's good and cold even in the heat of the summer! Nobody to stand gaping at us, talking about our little ears in August and wearing the skins of our best friends in December! No keeper to throw fish at us that's been caught on the line! Fresh fish right out of the sea! Eat 'em alive! Do we grieve for Alaska? Do we?"

The other sea lions waked wide awake. They gathered around in a sympathizing group. They gazed at the big sea lion with tears in their eyes.

Then such a barking and sneezing and spitting began that the woman began to wish she had never heard of Alaska. She looked on in dismay as the little sea lion high on the rock crawled slowly down and off into the water, the others submerged themselves, and the big brown sea lion, finding the reminiscence too much for him, wabbled to the edge and went in kerplunk.

As they dived to the bottom there came up a woful watery sneezing wail of:

"Alas! Alaska!"

And a bubbly sob could be seen here and there where a head had been.

"DO WE GRIEVE FOR ALASKA IN THIS WEATHER? DO WE?"

"WE'VE A LOT OF SEALSKINS BETTER THAN ANY OF THOSE," REMARKED THE SHOPGIRL WITH A COMPREHENSIVE WAVE OF HER HAND.

A SESSION OF THE PEACE CONFERENCE AS ONE MIGHT IMAGINE IT.

I strode away from the bright halls and broad piazzas of the Hotel Wentworth, where sat the envoys and their suites surrounded by bevies of adoring girls. I strode past groups of fellow correspondents, ignoring their invitations to join them in drinks.

Let them be content, thought I, with writing column after column of baseless rumors, vague surmises, unwarranted assumptions concerning the peace conference. Let them describe the new Panama hat of Mr. Witte, the table talk of Baron Komura, the graceful dancing of this or that secretary. Aye, let them! My conception of the duties of a correspondent was different.

Deep in thought, I reached the water, shed my clothes and stood for a moment in my bathing suit, trying to get accustomed to the idea of being a man of destiny. Then, with long powerful strokes I swam toward the old arsenal, where the session of the peace conference was to take place on the morrow.

As I had expected, I found a forgotten entrance in the old arsenal wall. Eluding every sentry, like the man of destiny that I was, I finally groped my way to an empty garret directly over the room where I intuitively knew that the peace conferences were held.

In the floor was a large hole, centrally located. In the eastern sky were the first streaks of dawn.

With a smile of triumph I lay down, my ear over the momentous hole in the floor, to snatch a few hours of well deserved sleep.

I was awakened by a sound in the room below. I placed my eye close to the hole, my heart beating violently. The envoys were just entering.

First came Mr. Witte and Baron Komura, chatting most amicably. Baron Rosen and Mr. Takahira followed, laughing over some little joke. The most complete cordiality and harmony seemed to prevail among the four envoys.

Not so with their suites, younger, more fiery men. They entered in two separate groups, silent and glowering, and went to opposite corners of the room. Their thoughts were evidently with their brothers in far Manchuria, locked in deadly conflict.

"Well, Baron," began Witte, taking a seat at the table in the middle of the room, "that was a particularly fine hop at the hotel last night."

"Ah, my friend," rejoined Baron Komura, "a pretty sight, but the American dance is not for me. I am not equal horizontally to the stride, nor perpendicularly to the girl. I find it most trying, most difficult."

The little Baron sighed.

"You will learn," said Mr. Witte, cheerily.

And then there was a great slapping of backs and offering of cigars.

But in their respective corners the suites glared at each other belligerently.

"I understand," said one Russian to another, purposely raising his voice, "that Tokio is inhabited exclusively by people wearing bathrobes."

"And I understand," observed another, "that the Mikado sits in the palace garden for hours, with a vapid smile, eating rice cakes and singing pointlessly to the moon."

In their corner the Japs chatted on indifferently. Presently one raised his voice.

"Have you heard that Kaiser Wilhelm considers the movements of Linievitch a direct act of aggression against the Russo-German frontier?" he inquired.

"Of course I have. Berlin is in a ferment about it," said a second Jap.

The Russians puffed vigorously at their cigars and began to glare more ferociously than ever.

"Boys, boys!" called Witte, reprovingly.

"Order!" cried Komura, frowning in the direction of the Japanese suite.

Clouds of smoke arose from both corners.

"Let us now discuss terms," said Witte.

Shaking with suppressed excitement, I glued my eye to the hole in the floor, through which history would soon be coming.

"In Tokio," came a voice from the Russian corner, "I understand that large yellow dogs without fixed domicile——"

"Silence!" shouted all four envoys together.

Again the hostile corners were enveloped in smoke.

"Baron," continued Witte, "I am quite sure that you handed me your terms in writing at the last session, but I have mislaid them. That hop last night upset me a bit. I must beg your pardon. Would you mind stating your terms again?"

"Not in the least," said Baron Komura. He coughed and remarked: "We want Port Arthur."

"So do we," said Witte.

"We want the Manchurian Railway."

"So do we."

"We want several hundred million dollars of your money."

"So do we."

"Agreed on every point!" shouted the little Baron, delighted. "This is really extraordinary at such an early stage in the conference."

Then he shook hands with Witte and Rosen shook hands with Takahira, and all shook hands with each other. A speedy peace seemed certain.

But at this point a most unseemly interruption occurred.

Nettled by half smothered insults proceeding from the Russian suite's corner, a Japanese secretary arose and inquired, in a honeyed voice, whether it was true that the Czar, before going to bed, painted a facsimile of his face on his foot and then slept with his foot on his pillow, to mislead assassins.

With a howl of rage the Russian suite sprang toward the Japs' corner. The first one who arrived ran up against a jiu-jitsu defence which prompted him to leave the room, head first, through the window, amid shattered glass and terrific profanity.

Witte and Komura, with considerable difficulty, separated the members of their suites and drove them, sullen and defiant, to their respective corners.

In the meantime Baron Rosen and Mr. Takahira had gone outside to hunt up the jiu-jitsued Russian. They found him with his head buried in mud, which spurted up around him like jets of lava from a volcano, owing to the violent cursing going on below. Having extricated him, they pulled him back to the room.

As they entered the two suites were apologizing and bowing profusely, with Mr. Witte and Baron Komura sternly superintending the ceremony.

"Apologize!" commanded Baron Rosen, turning to the jiu-jitsued Russian.

The eyes of the latter flashed through the mud with which they were caked.

"I understand," he roared, "that Oyama spent the two weeks of Mukden down a coal scuttle at Liaoyang!"

When the envoys had pried their suites apart they took them aside and for ten minutes gave them what I judged to be the most powerful, impressive and uncomfortable portions of the Japanese and Russian languages. Then Witte and Komura led them sternly toward each other.

A Russian stepped forward and said that he wished to withdraw his statement that a bathrobe was the exact equivalent of a frock coat in Tokio.

A Jap declared that all he knew about the Czar had been drawn from a ridiculously prejudiced source in the suburbs of Nagasaki.

Another Russian said that in his heart he had always questioned the report that the Mikado drank a Japanese vase full of sake every evening.

Another Jap said that he had invariably pooh-poohed the rumor that the horses of the Cossacks could not keep up with their riders in the martial fury of retreat.

Then all bowed and shook hands.

"You must visit me if you ever come to Tokio," said the jiu-jitsu expert to his victim, "84 Shickersnee Square, West."

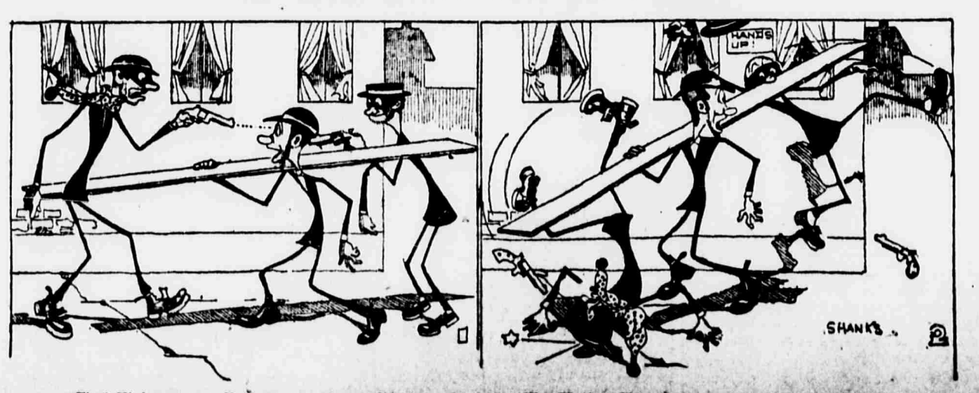
"Don't fail to look me up at 5 Dynamite Gardens, Popoff," rejoined the muddy Russian.

Then, after another round of bowing and handshaking all left for the hotel, the envoys keeping eagle eyes on their belligerent suites.

As night fell, enveloping Portsmouth and its old arsenal in darkness, a mysterious figure might have been seen (but fortunately wasn't) gliding through the silent water.

I was I, my head buzzing with contemporary history, swimming with long, powerful strokes toward the nearest telegraph [illegible]

THE SPINDLESHANK FOOTPADS TRY A HOLDUP.



First Highwayman—Your money or your life.

The Victim—How many are there of you, anyway?